WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A network performance monitoring system comprising:

a plurality of user modules, wherein each user module operates on a unique user machine coupled to one or more provider servers;

an experience test server for collecting data from the plurality of user modules, wherein the collected data includes at least one performance datum relating to user experience with a link from the user machine to the provider server; and

means for cleansing the collected data to account for variable user configurations.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the user machines are coupled to the provider servers over dial-up connections.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, further comprising a service level report generator, wherein a service level report generated by the service level report generator is a report indicating the level of service provided to the unique user machines and the level of service is based, at least in part, on the cleansed collected data.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the means for cleansing is a means for identifying when given data samples with disparate values represent similar samplings due to user configuration variations.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the data samples represent point-of-presence IDs and the disparate values result from user variations in representations of point-of-presence IDs.

6. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the data samples are clock times and the disparate values result from user variations in local clocks.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the experience test server further comprises logic to allocate tests among the plurality of user modules.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the logic to allocate tests among the plurality of user modules is logic that operates without requiring prior knowledge of the number of user modules available for running tests.

9. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the logic is logic programmed to allocate tests based on one or more criterion, wherein the one or more criterion are selected

from a test type, matching test parameters, maximum number of tests, test durations and conditions under which test can be allocated.

10. A method of determining a path taken by packets between a source and destination in a packet-switched network, the method comprising the steps of:

sending out a plurality of test packets, wherein at least two test packets of the plurality of test packets have differing values for a time-to-live variable;

recording IP addresses to IP devices at which the test packets expired;

sending a recording test packet to each of the IP addresses obtained in the step of recording, wherein a recording test packet is a test packet that causes an IP device to record a path of the test packet; and

analyzing the returned results of the recording test packets to determine the path taken from the packets between the source and the destination.

11. A method of measuring network performance in a distributed network where performance responsibility is allocated among more than one entity, the method comprising the steps of:

executing tests on the distributed network from a test point;

querying routers to determine router statistics; and

adjusting results of the executed tests based on the router statistics.

12. The method of claim 11, where the step of querying is a step of querying a central console which in turn queries a router.

13. In a dial-up network, wherein a client computer connects to a server computer over dial-up lines, a method of monitoring dial-up processes, comprising the steps of:

capturing dial-up parameters at the client computer, wherein the dial-up parameters represent inputs to a dial-in session;

upon activation of a dialer program on the client computer, hooking into the dialer program to obtain dial-up progress data, wherein the dial-up progress data represents user experience parameters.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of hooking comprises a step of intercepting function calls.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the step of monitoring is done as a background process.

16. A method of monitoring end-user experience of a plurality of users operating a plurality of interfaces to a distributed network, wherein each of the plurality of users is associated with an account on the distributed network and a service level and wherein compliance with the service level of a user is determined, at least in part, from the monitored end-user experience, the method comprising the steps of:

detecting when a user invokes connection code to connect a client system to the distributed network;

when the user invokes the connection code, monitoring the connection code to obtain user experience data about the connection process, wherein the user experience data is data relating to the user's experience with the distributed network;

transmitting the data obtained from the connection process to an experience test server, wherein the experience test server is a collector of user experience test server.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of monitoring is done as a background process.

18. A method of monitoring network-based services, comprising the steps of:

configuring client modules to contact an experience test server;

when a client module contacts the experience test server, allocating one or more network tests to the client module from the experience test server;

performing the one or more network tests using the client module; and

providing the test results to the experience test server from the client module.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising a step of allocating tests to distribute tests over time and distribute tests over available clients.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising a step of checking test quota limits associated with a client before instructing the client to run a test.

21. The method of claim 18, further comprising a step of dynamically controlling a rate of test allocation to distribute tests over a test period based on a current test rate.

22. The method of claim 18, further comprising a step of dynamically changing test allocation without prior knowledge of number of client modules available for testing.